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## Civic education vital for our youth

In Jim Slusher's "Voting is 'Plan Only,' and we have duty to help," he quotes a reader who says the "solution (to problems in local government) is greater citizen involvement to enhance public accountability." Slusher and the reader draw the legitimate conclusion that our eligible voting population is not using its power to hold local officials accountable.

While voters surely hold this power, there are more direct mechanisms to holding local officials accountable while they conduct our governments' business, and that is through monitoring local government activities. Of course, if people perceive they lack time, or treat their civic duty as a low priority, they will not utilize this method. In fact, according to the 2010 Illinois Civic Health Index, less than 10 percent of state residents had attended a public meeting of one of their local governments in the preceding year.

The problem is straightforward, and it's dire: Illinois fails to educate its youth in civics. Without a civically educated public, fewer involve themselves in using the political process to help prioritize and solve the problems they've identified as pressing concerns in their communities. The ultimate result is a crisis of legitimacy. People don't believe that the political system represents their interests, and yet they lack the confidence and skills to exercise their crucial role as responsible, civic-minded individuals to shape the political system to reflect a government we want, rather than one imposed upon us.

How can we increase civic participation, whether through voting or through monitoring, in Illinois? We all need to clamor for legislative and financial support for stronger civic education curriculums at all our public schools so our state's future residents will be poised to help solve the pressing problems our state faces.

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